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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to verify and extend the limited research on children's home reading. Subjects, 26 third- and 40 fifth-grade students from two elementary schools were asked to respond to questions concerning their home reading habits and were also interviewed. Data analysis revealed a significant difference between high- and low-ability students in frequency of home reading, suggesting that high-ability readers, at both third- and fifth-grade, do engage in home reading activities more often than low-ability readers, confirming earlier studies. Findings suggest that the combined influences of home and school help make reading successful and pleasurable for the child and hold the key to improving the child's reading ability and willingness to read. (Three tables of data are included.) (NH)

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Home Reading Behavior of Third- and Fifth-grade Students

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Home Reading Behavior of High and Low Reading Ability Third- and Fifth-grade Readers

The amount of reading that children do in school seems to be associated with reading achievement. Simply put, good readers do more contextual reading than poor readers. Gambrell, Wilson and Gantt (1981), for example, found that good readers were accorded 57% of instructional time for contextual reading while only 22% was allocated for poor readers. Allington (1977; 1980; 1983) has reported that good readers read approximately three times as many words during reading instruction than poor readers. Moreover, 75% of the reading done by the good readers is silent while only 25% of the poor readers' reading is done in that mode. While these data do not imply causation the connection between reading proficiency and the amount of school reading is intriguing.

The impact of the home on children's reading development is also substantial (Greaney, 1986). It has been argued that children's success in reading depends to a great extent on the literacy related activities that occur in the home. However despite the fact that promoting out-of-school reading is a common and important goal of the school reading curriculum, evidence to the extent to which this goal is obtained is lacking (Greaney, 1980).

Greaney (1980) points out that there are few studies that have focused on children's leisure or home reading. In a series

of landmark studies, for example, Durkin (1966) found that children who were already readers prior to beginning school came from homes in which literacy was encouraged. One activity that was consistently found in the homes of early readers was reading. These children came from homes in which family members read and in which the children were read to on a regular basis.

Several studies have found significant relationships between the amount of students' out-of-school reading and their level of reading proficiency (Connor, 1954; Greaney, 1980; Long & Henderson, 1973; Whitehead, Capey & Maddren, 1975; Wilson, 1984). In an early study Connor (1954), for example, found that good readers read more and higher quality reading materials than poor readers. Greaney (1980) had primary students in Ireland keep a diary of their after-school activities for three days. He found a .31 correlation between amount of book reading done and student reading achievement. On average the students spent 5.4% of their available time (less than 4 minutes per hour) in reading activities. Wilson (1984) reported a .4 correlation between after-school reading and reading achievement for American students.

The present study was an attempt to verify and extend the limited research conducted to date on children's home reading. The study attempted to determine if differences exist in the frequency and amount of time devoted to reading at home by the self report of high and low performing elementary grade readers. The study is significant in that it will add evidence in this

area that Greaney has argued lacks empirical data. Moreover, the data collection procedures are somewhat different than recent work in that students were asked directly to gauge their reading activities at home. Thus, the present study is an attempt to confirm earlier work on home reading behavior using a methodological approach which is unlike that used in previous studies.

Method

Twenty-six third- and forty fifth-grade students participated in the study. The students came from two elementary schools, representing both high and low SES neighborhoods. Both black and white students participated in the study. The students were equally divided into high and low ability reading groups. Ability group placement was based upon students' performance on the appropriate level of the Gates-MacGintie Reading Test. Those students scoring above the fifth stanine were identified as high-ability readers. Those scoring below the fifth stanine were designated as low-ability readers.

Each student in the third-grade sample was asked to rate how often he or she read at home. The student could choose one of three responses: almost every day, two or three times a week, or hardly ever.

Each fifth-grade student was asked two questions. The first asked the student to rate how often he or she reads at home. For the fifth-graders four response choices were provided: almost every day, four or five times a week, two or three times a

week, and hardly ever. The fifth-grade students were also asked to estimate the number of minutes spent reading at one time. The response choices here were ten minutes or less, between ten and thirty, and more than thirty.

Each student was interviewed individually by the same interviewer. Prior to asking the critical questions the interviewer had each student read a brief narrative passage, answer a set of related questions, and engage in conversation. A reasonable sense of rapport was developed with each student. In addition to having a written copy of the question and possible responses, the interviewer read each question and response to the student and clarified any questions or points of confusion. Originally, the third-graders were also asked to respond to a question about the amount of time spent reading at one time. However, it became apparent that their understanding of small units of time was not sufficient to provide accurate data on this behavior.

Results and Discussion

Chi-square analyses were performed on the data. The data is summarized in Tables 1 through 3. A significant difference between high and low ability students in frequency of home reading was found for both third-grade (chi sq (2)=7.79, p=.02) and fifth-grade (chi sq (3)=12.34, p=.006) students. Greater lengths of time spent reading at any one time at home tended to favor the high ability fifth-grade students, though not significantly (chi sq (2)-3.37, p=.18). These results suggest

that high ability readers, at both third- and fifth-grades do indeed engage in reading activities more often at home than low ability readers. Moreover, when they do read at home low ability fifth-grade readers may spend less time reading than their high-ability classmates.

Insert Tables 1-3 About Here

The results of this study tend to confirm earlier work in this area. Although the results do not prove that one reason good readers are indeed good readers is that they read extensively at home, a connection between the two is apparent. Moreover, if one accepts the notion that the amount of practice a person gets in a particular skill or activity is a determinant of proficiency in that skill or activity (Laberge & Samuels, 1973; Samuels, 1979) then it would seem likely that practice in reading at home is crucial to reading success. And, low ability readers practice reading less often at home than high ability readers.

Schools need to encourage children to do voluntary recreational reading outside of school. Schools, however, may be part of the present problem. Morrow (1985) and Lamme (1976), for example, argue that low levels of voluntary reading may be due to the fact that most school reading instruction is oriented to skill building and preparation for standardized tests with little overt reading for enjoyment. Indeed, Allington (1983) has reported that poor readers tend to get larger doses of skills

instruction than good readers whose instruction is more typified by contextual reading.

Morrow and Weinstein (1986) have demonstrated that schools can successfully encourage voluntary reading. A school-based program in which 20 minutes per day were devoted to promoting voluntary reading through literature enrichment and a home-based program in which parents were trained to read to and do other Literacy related activities with their children resulted in significant increases in second-graders' voluntary reading in school. These results, however, did not appear to transfer to reading in the home. Similarly, Greaney (1970) found that systematic school-based efforts to foster leisure reading were successful with primary grade students. However, many of these successes, in terms of time devoted to reading, had disappeared within six years (Greaney & Clarke, 1975).

The literature is replete with other suggestions for promoting home reading and related activities in the home. Spiegel (1981), for example, offers suggestions for schools to encourage parental involvement in a recreational reading program at home. Whether such activities actually promote leisure reading and reading achievement has yet to be fully demonstrated. Regardless, such activities seem to be fully worth the effort and should continue to be implemented and evaluated.

To conclude, in a recent review of parental factors impacting on reading Greaney (1986) points to the combined influences of home and school in making reading successful and

pleasurable as the key to improving the child's reading ability and willingness to read:

> Parents have an important contribution to make, both to the development of reading skills and encouraging the leisure reading habit. This they can do by introducing the child to the printed word, by creating an environment which helps to foster reading by providing opportunity, space, materials, encouragement, and example. . .
>
> It is the task of parents and the school to help make encounters with print satisfying and pleasurable, thereby introducing the young person to a new world of adventure and ideas which can both illuminate and change his or her future life. (p. 817)

Reading educators and researchers need to continue to design and promote home reading activities and evaluate the extent to which those activities achieve their intended outcomes.

Table 1

Frequency of Reading at Home for
Third-grade Students

	Almost Daily		2-3 Times Per Week		Hardly Ever	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
High Ability	9	69.2	3	23.1	1	7.7
Low Ability	2	15.4	9	69.2	2	15.4

chi sq (2)=7.788 p=.0202

Table 2

Frequency of Reading at Home for
Fifth-grade Students

	Almost Daily		4-5 Times Per Week		2-3 Times Per Week		Hardly Ever	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
High Ability	14	70	2	10	2	10	2	10
Low Ability	4	20	1	5	9	45	6	30

chi sq (3)=12.343 p=.006

Table 3

Length of Time Spent Reading at Home
at One Time for Fifth-grade Students

	More Than 30 Minutes		10-30 Minutes		10 Minutes or Less	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
High Ability	12	60	7	35	1	5
Low Ability	7	35	9	45	4	20

chi sq (2)=3.366 p=.1844

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